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The Buddhist Faith of the Japanese Imperial Family after the Meiji Restoration

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I argue here that Buddhist faith endured in the imperial court, notably with the empress and members of the imperial family, even after the court relocated to Tokyo and after the new government had issued its *shinbutsu bunri* edicts, which aimed to separate kami practice from Buddhist practice. After 1877, all members of the imperial family were required to perform Shinto-style rites for their ancestors, at least in appearance. However, Buddhist faith was allowed within the private sphere. After its restoration in 1883, the Sen'nyūji temple was positioned anew as the ancestral temple for all the emperors who had lived in the erstwhile capital of Heian. Moreover, the funerals for Dowager empress Eishō in 1897, and for Prince Akira in 1898, were both performed according to esoteric Buddhist practice. It is clear, too, that in the new imperial palace in Tokyo, the empress's personal belief in the *nenbutsu* continued unabated.

Keywords: *Shinbutsu bunri*, Sen'nyūji, Dowager Empress Eishō, Prince Akira, *nenbutsu*, funerals, emperor system, Okurodo, imperial ancestors

1

Kudō Miyoko 工藤美代子, the non-fiction writer, has left a fascinating testimony to the endurance of syncretic Buddhist rituals within the imperial palace throughout the Meiji period and beyond. In her book *Haha miya Teimei Kōgō to sono jidai* 母宮貞明皇后とその時代, Prince Mikasa no Miya Takahito 三笠宮崇仁, Princess Mikasa no Miya Yuriko 百合子 and Konoe Yasuko 近衛甯子 look back at the *ofuneiri* 御舟入 rite, performed when Empress Teimei passed away on 17 May 1951.

Konoe Yasuko: When Empress Teimei passed away and placed in the coffin, we wrote *Namu myōhō renga kyō* 南無妙法蓮華經, and *Namu Amida butsu* 南無阿彌陀仏 on strips of paper and put them in her coffin. I well remember the scene.

...

Princess Yuriko: Yes. We cut strips of Japanese paper a few centimeters wide and about 10 centimeters long, didn't we?

Prince Takahito: Of course! I did it as well. Everyone wrote them, twisted those papers, and put them in.

Princess Yuriko: Ink-stones were always there, and whenever we had free time, we wrote them out. Both *Namu myōhō renge kyō* and *Namu Amida butsu* are nice to write. This is what we did before twisting the paper tight. And we wrote so many of them that, gathered together, they were like a cushion. We put this “cushion” inside the coffin.¹

Empress Teimei’s funeral in 1951 leaves no doubt that Buddhist belief endured within the private realm of the court even into the period of the symbolic emperor system. The premise for such practice was the position adopted by the Imperial Household Ministry in 1877 to sanction the imperial family’s Buddhist belief in the private sphere of the court. In other words, the empress, members of the imperial family and maids of honor, who had grown up in the vibrant religious environment of late Edo period where no institutional distinctions were made between kami and Buddha practice, were able to continue their premodern religious practices unchanged after their removal to Tokyo. This religious freedom was also guaranteed for the Taishō generation of imperial family members, all born in Tokyo, even if their links to Kyoto and former Buddhist strongholds were considerably diluted.

2

This short paper sets out to demonstrate that the Buddhist faith was, indeed, kept alive in the private sphere of the imperial family even after the separation of Shinto and Buddhist deities at the court (*shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離) in 1871. The evidence comes from primary sources in Sen’nyūji temple 泉涌寺, as well as published sources. In what follows, I first point out cases of Buddhist prayer services offered up to cure the sickness of Crown Prince Haru (Haru no Miya 明宮; later Emperor Taishō). These were held at Sen’nyūji in September 1895 and performed before Fudō Myōō 不動明王 and Enmaten 焰魔天. I then highlight the Buddhist funeral rites of Prince Akira 晃親王 in 1898. These are striking examples of the durability of Buddhist faith and practice within the Tokyo imperial palace in Meiji Japan.

Crown Prince Haru caught influenza in March 1895 and recovered, but he then succumbed to typhoid fever in June, and in August he presented the symptoms of pleurisy and pneumonia.² Erwin Baelz, the German doctor who came to Japan in 1876 and taught at Tokyo University, was called on 11 August, but was unable to cure him; acupuncture and magic were equally ineffective. Nakayama Yoshiko 中山慶子 (Emperor Meiji’s birth mother) and the court chamberlains asked Sen’nyūji monks to perform prayer rites using a robe (*gyoi* 御衣) that belonged to Crown Prince Haru. This they duly did intoning prayers to Fudō Myōō and to Enmaten for a period of seven days from 7 September. Thereafter, the prince’s robe was brought back to the court in Tokyo, where it was the object of further Buddhist prayers. Court belief in the benefits of prayers to Fudō Myōō and to Enmaten had its origins in the Heian period, and here is evidence that this endured without break into modern times. It is this Buddhist belief at court in Tokyo in 1895 that I treat in this paper.

1 Kudō 2007, pp. 219–21. Recent years have seen the publication of the following studies, which make reference to the continued practice of Buddhism within the private realm of the imperial court through Meiji and beyond: Ishikawa 2009; Ogura and Yamaguchi 2011. See also Takagi 2011, where Meiji court Buddhist practice is analyzed specifically in connection with the Sen’nyūji 泉涌寺 temple.

2 Hara 2000, p. 42.

The Sen'nyūji (Figure 1) was the imperial family's *bodaiji* 菩提寺 or ancestral temple in the Edo period; its monks memorialized deceased emperors and imperial family members from emperor Shijō 四条 (r. 1232–1242) in the Kamakura period, through Go-Mizunoo 後水尾天皇 (r. 1611–1629) and Go-Kōmyō 後光明天皇 (r. 1643–1654) in the Edo period. The state funeral (*taisō* 大葬) of Emperor Kōmei 孝明天皇 (r. 1846–1866) in January 1867 was the first step taken toward the so-called separation of “Shinto” and Buddhism within the court; the monks of Sen'nyūji were now relieved of responsibility for imperial mausoleums. Nonetheless, Buddhist ceremonies continued at Sen'nyūji for imperial family mem-



Figure 1. The Sen'nyūji temple from the air. In the background, the cluster of early modern mausolea are visible. (With permission, the Sen'nyūji temple, Kyoto.)

bers beyond the Meiji Restoration, albeit within the private sphere. After the “separation” in 1871, the imperial ancestors’ memorial tablets (*ihai* 位牌) and the *nenjibutsu* 念持仏, that is small statues of Buddha kept beside the person, were moved from the Kyoto palace’s Kurodo 御黒戸 chamber to the Kyōmei palace 恭明宮.³ When this palace was abolished in 1873, they were finally entrusted to the care of the Sen'nyūji. Emperors’ memorial tablets and the *nenjibutsu* that had been entrusted to various Kyoto temples, such as Hanju Zanmai-in 般舟三昧院, were brought together at Sen'nyūji in 1876.

It should be noted here that Sen'nyūji monks studied four schools of Buddhism 四宗兼学: Tendai 天台, Shingon 真言, Ritsu 律, and Zen 禅, although the dominant school in the early modern period was Ritsu. After 1872, however, Sen'nyūji was placed under Shingon sect control. This fact has served to convey the mistaken impression that Sen'nyūji had always belonged to the Shingon “tradition” of Tantric Buddhism.

On 3 January 1877, the Imperial Household Ministry determined that, even though all worship (*bōsai* 奉祭) of the imperial family would be officially held according to Shinto rites, the individual’s personal faith would be respected.⁴ This would apply to memorial services, visiting and praying at memorial halls, the offering of incense (*shōkō* 焼香) and the dedication of colored flowers (*irohana* 色花). Thus, for example, former maids of honor (*nyōkan* 女官) who had previously lived in Kyoto were able now to return and visit Sen'nyūji openly for the memorial services of Emperors Ninkō 仁孝天皇 and Kōmei; they had meals there together, and brought back to Tokyo as souvenirs rice cakes stamped with the Buddha’s figure. In October 1882, however, there came a great crisis. A fire broke out at Sen'nyūji and almost

3 The classic treatment of the separation of Shinto and Buddhism within the imperial court is Sakamoto 1983. For a thoroughgoing reappraisal, see Takagi 2011.

4 *Sen'nyūji shi* 1984, p. 534.

all the temple buildings, except the Buddha Hall itself, were lost. As a result, all manner of memorial tablets were evacuated to the Unryūin 雲龍院, a semi-autonomous sub-temple of Sen'nyūji. Tokudaiji Sanetsune 徳大寺実則, the chief administrator of the imperial household, submitted a request to government on 1 March 1883 for more than 65,000 yen to pay for the reconstruction of Sen'nyūji, and for the relocation of Sato Goten 里御殿, the quarter of the palace where generations of empresses had given birth to their children.

It would have been easy for the government now to abandon Sen'nyūji altogether, but they chose rather to reconstruct in the manner Tokudaiji was proposing. Why was this so? The reason was simply that the government wished to entrust to Sen'nyūji authority to protect “more than one hundred and forty spirits of the emperors since emperor Tenji 天智.”⁵ Sen'nyūji was charged with memorializing all emperors and imperial family members starting with Emperor Tenji (r. 668–672) through Kōnin 光仁天皇 (r. 770–781) and on to Kanmu 桓武天皇 (r. 781–806) and all subsequent emperors who had lived in the capital Heian. In January 1883, Iwakura Tomomi 岩倉具視 issued a position paper called *Kyōto Kōgū hozon ni kanshi ikensho* 京都皇宮保存に關し意見書 (On preserving the Kyoto palace).⁶ This was a plan for the total reconstruction of Kyoto as ancient capital. Iwakura's primary purpose was ensuring that imperial enthronements would henceforth be held in Kyoto, but he also proposed the revival of the Kamo festival (Kamo matsuri 賀茂祭) and the Iwashimizu *hōjōe* 石清水放生会 rite, as well as the construction of a Heian shrine.⁷ The context for Iwakura's paper was the re-evaluation by intellectuals of the place of history and tradition within the dominant international stream of thinking. Kyoto was differentiated from Nara, the ancient capital “founded by emperor Jinmu,” and it was positioned, contrary to the modern imperial capital of Tokyo, as the resting place of emperors and imperial family members who had lived in Heian. This positioning was made possible especially by the continuation of the imperial family's Buddhist practice since 1877, and by the enduring belief in Buddhism of empress dowagers, empresses and other members of the imperial family.

When Crown Prince Haru was attacked by fever and abdominal pain in November 1884, Emperor Meiji was himself deeply concerned, and let it be known to Nakayama Yoshiko, emperor Meiji's birth-mother, and her father, Nakayama Tadayasu 忠能, that they were at liberty to pray to both Shinto and Buddhist deities for the Crown Prince's recovery. Emperor Meiji could not of course allow this to become public knowledge.⁸ Moreover, as I discuss in detail below, Prince Yamashina Akira had requested of the Privy Council (Sūmitsuin 枢密院) permission that his own funeral rites be Buddhist, but his request was denied. Emperor Meiji, however, guessed the feelings of the prince, and allowed him a clandestine Buddhist funeral. In addition, on the occasion of the funeral of Empress Dowager Eishō 英照皇太后 in January 1897, Shaku Gen'yū 釈玄猷, the chief monk of Unryūin at Sen'nyūji successfully sought government permission to conduct Buddhist rites. After all, the Empress Dowager's Buddhist faith was evident in the small statue of Buddha she kept beside her in the Tokyo palace. The monk Kanae Ryūgyō 鼎龍暁 and Shaku Gen'yū both visited the Ōmiya palace 大宮御所 on 4 February where they performed an esoteric *indō* 引導 ritual with Buddhist instruments

5 Nara period emperors claimed descent from Tenmu 天武, but in the Heian period they switched their claims to descent from Emperor Tenji (*Senzan ryōbachi to Sen'nyūji ni kansuru nenpyō* 泉山陵墓地と泉涌寺に関する年表).

6 Iwakura kō 1906, pp. 2038–2048.

7 Takagi 1997, Chapter 2.

8 Kunaichō 1971a, p. 316.

brought from Sen'nyūji, to ensure the Empress Dowager entered the Pure Land. In addition, the modern imperial court in Tokyo maintained the Edo period practice of keeping small statues of Buddha. For example, in December 1890 a statue of Amida Nyorai 阿弥陀如来 removed to Sen'nyūji from the Kyōmei palace was returned to Empress Shōken 昭憲皇后 via Kagawa Keizō 香川敬三, Master of the Empress's Household.⁹

3

For nine weeks beginning in spring 1895, Crown Prince Haru 明宮皇太子, suffered from sclerosis of the spleen, and ran a high fever. So, in early August he moved to the Takanawa 高輪 palace to recuperate. But there, ten days later, he succumbed to another fever; on 18 August he became seriously ill with pneumonia, his fever exceeding 40 degrees. His medical condition remained serious thereafter. On 27 August, Kanae Ryūgyō duly sent a consolatory letter to Hijikata Hisamoto 土方久元, Minister of the Imperial Household.¹⁰ He also communicated his sympathy to Kurokawa Michinori 黒川通軌, Master of the Crown Prince's Household. Here he not only inquired about Crown Prince Haru's condition, he also let it be known he was secretly praying for his recovery. Kanae subsequently performed esoteric rites before Fudō Myōō 不動明王秘法 at Sen'nyūji. Also, much to the satisfaction of Nakayama Yoshiko, the Crown Prince's grandmother, Kanae dedicated a talisman to the Crown Prince's palace (Tōgu Goten 東宮御殿). In fact, after the Meiji Restoration no daily Buddhist prayers had been performed, and no such talismans had been accepted at court, but the Crown Prince's condition made this an exceptional time, and members of the board of the Crown Prince's affairs decided to place the talismans in the Crown Prince's palace, where everyone was supposed to pray to them.

The aforementioned Shaku Gen'yū, the second most senior prelate at Sen'nyūji, submitted another petition to government insisting this was a matter of national importance: it was natural for people to pray now with sincerity, and nowhere more so than at Sen'nyūji, a temple with a long and distinguished history of links to the imperial family. Shaku insisted that the efficacy of the tantric prayers held in Sen'nyūji demanded the court have faith in them, and he sought permission to perform incantations before a robe of the Crown Prince, following the precedent of the *Goshichinichi no mishiho* 後七日御修法 rites in which prayers were offered at Tōji temple for the emperor's health before a robe of the emperor's. Nakayama Yoshiko regarded Shaku's petition as entirely reasonable, and immediately brought it to the attention of the Crown Prince's advisors, most senior of whom were grand master Kurokawa Michinori, and chief chamberlain Nakayama Takamaro 中山孝麿. On the night of 2 September, she duly had her steward Ishiyama Tomomasa 石山友誠 meet Shaku Gen'yū in the Daianrakuji 大安楽寺 temple (Shin Kōyasan 新高野山) in Nihonbashi, Tokyo. Ishiyama handed him a robe of the Crown Prince. Later that same night, Shaku wrote to Kanae that Nakayama Yoshiko was entirely satisfied with their proposal for incantations before the Crown Prince's robe. He also stressed the importance of not leaking news of this to the press. After all, this was an exceptional request made privately to Sen'nyūji, and it would not do to have other temples proposing that they too perform rites on the Crown Prince's behalf. Shaku

⁹ Takagi 2011.

¹⁰ The discussion here is based on *Meiji nijū hachi nen kugatsu nanoka yori nanokakan Fudō Myōō ku o inori no koto, komishiho* 明治28年9月7日より7日間不動明王供御祈之事、小御修法. "Sen'nyūji monjo" 泉涌寺文書.

returned immediately to Kyoto and prepared for prayers to Fudō Myō'ō and to Enmaten.

The esoteric *Fudō mishiho* 不動御修法 ritual was duly performed for the crown prince's recuperation as well as for his longevity by ten Sen'nyūji monks over a period of seven days from 7 September. In the Sen'nyūji reliquary hall (*shariden* 舍利殿), monks placed the prince's robe 御衣 before Fudō Myō'ō (positioned at the center toward the back). The great altar (*daidan* 大壇) was to the fore, and the folding frame and the Enmaten mandala 焰魔天曼荼羅 (Figure 2) were to the left, with the *goma* altar (*gomadan* 護摩壇) to the right. Here, the monks intoned prayers and made offerings to Fudō Myō'ō at the great altar twenty one times and at the *goma* altar twenty one times. Prayers to the deities outside the reliquary hall (*jinku* 神供) were chanted three times, and to Enmaten seven times. Monks chanted such spells such as the mantra of the Buddha's eye (*Butsugen shingon* 仏眼真言) and the Dainichi mantra (*Dainichi shingon* 大日真言) thousands, or perhaps tens of thousands, of times. The petition to Enma (*Enma tenku saimon* 焰魔天供祭文) on 7 September noted that neither prayers nor medicines had been efficacious in treating the Crown Prince's illness despite the anxiety of many, including the emperor himself. The monks prayed for his recovery to Enmaten, who had charge of the underworld (*meikai* 冥界), and decided the fate of the dead as well as the degree of their punishment and rewards in the afterlife. Believers decorated the ritual site, presenting offerings and performing seven days of ritual prayers.

Shaku was to return to the Tokyo palace from Kyoto station at 3 p.m. on 14 September with the robe that had been the center of these esoteric rites. Later, Crown Prince Haru recovered from his illness and, two weeks later on 27 November, Kanae received a letter of thanks from Ishiyama Tomomasa. Nakayama Yoshiko subsequently donated to Sen'nyūji 2,000 *hiki* 疋 by way of thanksgiving to Fudō Myō'ō.



Figure 2. Enmaten. (With permission, the Sen'nyūji temple, Kyoto.)

4

Here I take up the Buddhist funeral of Prince Akira (Figure 3) in 1898, as another striking indication of the relationship between the imperial family and Buddhism in the Meiji imperial court. The funeral rites of Empress Dowager Eishō in 1897 and of Prince Akira in 1898 have been regarded as milestones in the establishment of modern, Shinto-style funerals for the imperial family. In Prince Akira's 1898 will, however, he articulated his desire that his

encoffining and cremation be conducted in the Kajūji 勧修寺 temple style of Shingon Buddhism. The Privy Council however dismissed his posthumous request.¹¹ The official position of the Meiji government is to be found in *Meiji tennō ki*, volume 9, the editing of which was not completed by the imperial house hold until 1933. What follows draws on the *Meiji tennō ki* account.

On 17 February 1898, Prince Kikumaro 菊麿, the heir of Prince Akira, expressed his hope to Imperial Household Minister Tanaka Mitsuaki 田中光顕, that the will of Prince Akira after all be respected, and that all his funeral rites be held in Buddhist style. Prince Akira had believed he could not attain Buddha hood without Buddhist funeral rites. Tanaka, however, averred that:

The system of imperial rituals was fixed after the Meiji Restoration, and no Buddhist ceremony has been held at court since the third anniversary of emperor Kōmei in 1868. Funeral rituals [in the court] are based on the *Jingi shiki* 神祇式: the practice was established at the funeral of Empress Dowager Eishō. This is also in accordance with ancient tradition.

Tanaka duly submitted a report to the emperor, and awaited his decision; after all, imperial funeral rites had to be modeled on those established for the imperial family and personal feelings were not an issue. The third anniversary of Emperor Kōmei to which Tanaka refers here was commemorated on 25 March 1868. It was indeed a Shinto ceremony with the emperor worshipping the kami in the Shishinden 紫宸殿 hall of the Kyoto palace. The head of the Jingikan 神祇官 dedicating offerings; ceremonial petitions (*saimon* 祭文) were recited, and rites of kami ascent (*shōshin* 昇神) were performed. Buddhist rituals were not held, or so at least it was maintained. Anyway, with regard to the matter of Prince Akira's will, Emperor Meiji appreciated the importance of the prince's will and sought the advice of the Privy Council. The Privy Council's response was to this effect:

There have been few examples of state funerals being held in Buddhist style after the medieval period. Since the Restoration, ritual proceedings have been established for official state funerals according to ancient practice. If an exception is made to allow the prince to perform a Buddhist funeral, the danger is that chaos will ensue for future generations. The emperor took this advice on board, and instructed Tanaka to have a *Jingi shiki* style funeral performed. In this way, ostensibly at least, the official funeral for the prince accorded to the *Jingi shiki*.¹²

However, the real scenario of the funeral was that privately a Buddhist funeral was offered up exactly as in the early modern period. Indeed, too, the third anniversary rite performed



Figure 3. Prince Akira.
(Yamashinakai, ed. *Yamashina no miya sandai*. Yamashinakai, 1982.)

¹¹ Yamashinakai 1982, pp. 780–84.

¹² Kunaichō 1971b, pp. 397–98.

for Emperor Kōmei cited by the Privy Council as precedent was not what it appeared either. True, a Shinto rite involving the presentation of *tamagushi* 玉串 was performed at Kōmei's mausoleum on 24 and 25 March. However, Buddhist rites were also conducted at Sen'nyūji, just as in the early modern period. These were the solemn rites of *rishu zanmai* 理趣三昧 on 23 March (it being the night before the anniversary), and *hokke senpō* 法華懺法 on the following day.¹³ Here, I wish to explore what significance might be attributed to the performance of these Buddhist rites in modern Japan.

Prince Akira, the leading character here, was born on 2 September 1816 as the eldest son of Prince Fushimi no Miya Kuniie 伏見宮邦家 and next year, succeeded as *monzeki* 門跡 to the Kajūji temple. At the age of seven, he started training in Shingon esoteric Buddhism. His training included the *Sangō shiiki* 三教指帰 by Kukai 空海 (a three-episode long story that indicates differences between the goals of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism), as well as mantra and dharani 陀羅尼. He performed court incantations and prayers, and underwent the *denpō kanjō* 伝法灌頂 rite of investment as master. Indeed, he remained a monk till his 40s. He was a cultivated man, who had deep knowledge of Shinto, and the Chinese and Japanese classics, calligraphy, tanka poetry and so on. But in the tumultuous times at the end of the Tokugawa shogunate, he returned to secular status, and in 1864 formed the Yamashina no Miya 山階宮 house. Participating in politics like his younger brother, Prince Asahiko 朝彦親王, Prince Akira became *kokuji goyō gakari* 国事御用掛, a court adviser on political affairs, and concerned himself with the second Chōshū 長州 Expedition, imperial sanction for the trade treaties, and the opening of Hyōgo port amongst other things.

In 1872, he moved to Tokyo, but in August 1877 at the age of 62, he retired due to illness and spent the rest of his days in Kyoto. He visited the ancient capital's famous spots, shrines and temples. He worshipped at Kotohiragū 金刀比羅宮 shrine on 11th, Hachimangū 八幡宮 shrine on 15th, Kiyomizudera 清水寺 temple on 17th, Taishidō 大師堂 at Tōji 東寺 temple on 21st, Kitano Tenmangū 北野天満宮 on 25th of every month. He went on pilgrimage, especially to the various places associated with Kan'on worship. On 4 January 1882, he dedicated offerings at a small shrine of a local Shinto deity, and also rice offerings (*bushō* 仏餉) to the family Buddhist altar in his villa at Takano Shinden 高野神田 (in present day Sakyōku, Kyoto). For example, he attended the 30th anniversary of Shintai Kenmon-in 新待賢門院, emperor Kōmei's birth mother on 6 August 1886, and the 20th anniversary of Emperor Kōmei on 20 December in the same year. Both were held in Buddhist style at Sen'nyūji. On 10 September 1888, the 17th Buddhist memorial service of Prince Fushimi no Miya Kuniie, father of Prince Akira, was held in Shōkokuji 相国寺 temple. The combinatory character of religious practice (*shinbutsu konkō* 神仏混淆) was for him a matter of course.

Buddhist memorial services for imperial family members were almost daily events in Kyoto, and Prince Akira attended them without fail. Also, twice a year he hosted parties in his villa at Takano Shinden: on the first day of the horse in February (*hatsuuma* 初午), and on the day of *hotaki* 火焚き in November, and *fuigo* 躰, a bonfire festival held at the Inari shrine in the 11th lunar month. These were free and easygoing events where the prince distributed to family tradesmen and neighborhood children offerings of fruits and sweets. In the early modern period, "crowds of high and low alike" participated in the religious and

13 *Sen'nyūji shi* 1984, Chapter 3.

ritual world of the court. Examples of this phenomenon include *setsubun* 節分 in winter and the summer lantern festival, and pilgrimage to the Myō'onten 妙音天 shrines within the residences of Prince Fushimi in Demachi 出町 and Saionji 西園寺 in the courtier district.¹⁴ It would appear that Prince Akira took especial pleasure in the changing of the seasons, in the surroundings of Kyoto's famous temples and shrines.

The foundation for the imperial family's practice of Buddhist funerals was already laid by Prince Akira on 21 September 1872, just before his move to Tokyo. The prince held in high esteem the senior monk Jingen 尋玄, who had presided over the funeral of Emperor Kōmei, chanting prayers to the deceased emperor. The prince visited Jingen at Shin Zenkōji 新善光寺, a sub-temple of Sen'nyūji, for the 33rd memorial service of Emperor Kōkaku 光格 and the 7th of Emperor Kōmei. Even after his move to Tokyo, the prince repeatedly made clear to monks at Shin Zenkōji his wish to have his own funeral accord with shingon practice, regardless of whether an "official" Shinto funeral would be performed or not.¹⁵

On 7 February 1897, Prince Akira attended the funeral of Empress Dowager Eishō. The empress dowager's coffin (*reikyū* 靈柩) left the Ōmiya palace 大宮御所 at 6 a.m. for the funeral hall on Mt. Tsukinowa 月輪. There, a eulogy was chanted and a *tamagushi* offered. On the next day, 8 February, the coffin was moved to the mausoleum in the graveyard, and there followed the coffin burial. This was ostensibly a Shinto funeral from beginning to end. But on 4 February Kanae Ryūgyō, the senior Sen'nyūji monk, had already performed Shingon esoteric Buddhist rites before the empress dowager's coffin in the Ōmiya imperial palace deploying tantric ritual implements brought from Sen'nyūji.¹⁶ Then, on 11 February, Sen'nyūji monks held the *shogakki* 初月忌 memorial service to mark the passage of a month after death. There followed a memorial service in Zuiryūji 瑞龍寺 temple (Kamigyōku, Kyoto), whose *monzeki* was a younger sister of Prince Akira. On 26 February, a memorial service was also performed at Myōhōin 妙法院 temple. Prince Akira attended all these rites. He also persuaded the bereaved children of Uematsu Fuyuko 植松冬子 (Prince Akira's common-law wife, laid to rest in Shin Zenkōji after her death on 7 November 1896) to devote themselves to daily Buddhist rites.

Prince Akira's funeral the following year was carried out ostensibly in Shinto form, under instructions from the Privy Council, as mentioned above. But Emperor Meiji took the prince's "true heart" into account, and privately let it be known that a Buddhist funeral might be conducted clandestinely, in conformity with the prince's last will. Accordingly, at 7 p.m. on 19 February 1898, a Buddhist style encoffining rite (*nyūkan sahō* 入棺作法) was conducted privately. On 26 February, after the graveside Shinto ceremony (*gokanzen sai* 御棺前祭), Kanae headed a procession of many monks, and conducted Buddhist burial rites. Next, beginning with the *futananukaki hōyō* 二七日忌法要 memorial rites at Kajūji temple on 2 March, Buddhist ceremonies were conducted in the palace of Prince Akira at Sen'nyūji, and also at Shin Zenkōji. A memorial pagoda to accommodate his hair and teeth (*shihatsu tō* 齒髮塔) was erected in Shin Zenkōji on 27 May, also in accordance with the Prince's last wishes.¹⁷

¹⁴ Takagi 2006, Chapter 3.

¹⁵ Yamashinakai 1982, pp. 198 and 322.

¹⁶ Takagi 2011, pp. 121–22.

¹⁷ Yamashinakai 1982, pp. 786–88.

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These several cases attest to the duration of the Buddhist faith in the court among emperor, empress, and imperial family members—not to mention maids of honor—into the modern period. The cases introduced here offer a striking contrast to the established theory which holds that, after 1871, the emperor and court performed pure Shinto rites and lived in a pure Shinto space. The facts, however, are that Empress Dowager Eishō and Empress Shōken both prayed to their personal statues of Buddha and performed Buddhist esoteric rites for the Crown Prince when he fell grievously ill. At the same time, their Buddhist faith, sanctioned by the imperial household after 1877, was positioned as an example of “religious freedom” in the private sphere, in contrast to the public State Shinto established with the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution.

There are yet other examples of Buddhist faith permitted within the private sphere of the imperial court. For instance, in 1882 the *Goshichinichi no mishiho*, a seven day New Year ritual of Shingon Buddhism, was revived as a private event within the Tōji temple. The Kamo festival, the Iwashimizu *hōjōe*, and the Kasuga 春日 festival are other rites revived in response to the aforementioned petition by Iwakura Tomomi, referred to above. These modern revivals were unconnected to the imperial court. The point, however, is that the premodern faith and the premodern religious dispositions of the imperial family, and also of Kyoto shrines and temples, were guaranteed in various different ways within the constitutional frame for the relationship between state and religion and religious freedom. Of course, State Shinto emerges in the late 1880s following the so-called “pantheon dispute” with its rejection of Izumo Shinto 出雲神道 and its heavy emphasis on the kami Ōkuninushi 大国主 and the afterlife. The abolition of the *kyōdōshoku* 教導職 system of state proselytizers quickly followed, allowing Shinto to emerge as “state ritual.” Within the institutional frame of the Meiji Constitution of 1889, Buddhism, Shinto sects like Tenrikyō 天理教 and Konkōkyō 金光教 as well as Christianity were accommodated within State Shinto and granted “religious freedom” within the private sphere.¹⁸

However, there were of course well documented cases of suppression. In 1891 for example the Christian Uchimura Kanzō 内村鑑三 was dismissed from his post as a teacher at the First High School in Tokyo for refusing to pay obeisance to the imperial rescript on education. In 1921 and again in 1935, Ōmotokyō 大本教 was suppressed for acts of *lèse majesté*. In other words, imperial subjects had their religious freedom curtailed whenever they threatened to infringe upon State Shinto. At the very same time, a flexible structure was maintained allowing the free practice of religion within the private realm of the imperial court.

18 Inoue Nobutaka 井上順孝 and Sakamoto Koremaru 阪本是丸 regard this arrangement as “peculiarly Japanese.” (Inoue and Sakamoto 1987). See also Miyachi and Yasumaru 1988, and Haga 1994.

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